Galway Kinnell

Why Regret?

Didn’t you like the way the ants help
the peony globes open by eating the glue off?
Weren’t you cheered to see the ironworkers
sitting on an I-beam dangling from a cable,
in a row, like starlings, eating lunch, maybe
baloney on white with fluorescent mustard?
Wasn’t it a revelation to waggle
from the estuary all the way up the river,
the kill, the pirl, the run, the rent, the beck,
the sike nearly dry, to the shock of a spring?
Didn’t you almost shiver, hearing the hoar lies
clucking their sexual dissonance inside the old
Webster’s New International, perhaps having just
eaten out of it izle, xyster and thalassacon?
What did you imagine lay in store anyway
at the end of a world whose sub-substance is
gleyne, gleet, birdlime, shime, mucus, mucK?
Don’t worry about becoming emaciated—think of the wren
and how little flesh is needed to make a song.
Hadn’t it seem somehow familiar when the nymph
split open and the mayfly struggled free
and flew and perched and then its own back
split open and the imago, the true adult,
somersaulted out backwards and took flight
toward the swarm, mouth-parts vestigial,
 alimentary canal unfit to digest food,
a day or hour left to find the desired one?
Or when Casanova took up the platter of linguine
in squid’s ink and slid the stuff off it
out the window, telling his startled companion,
“Tha perfected lover does not eat.”
As a child didn’t you find it calming to think
of the pinworms as some kind of tiny batons
giving cadence to the squeezes and releases
around the downward march of debris?
Didn’t you once glimpse what seemed your own
inner blazonry in the monarchs flapping
and gliding, in desire, in the middle air?
Weren’t you reassured at the thought that these flimsy,
hinged beings might navigate their way to Mexico
by the flair of the dead bodies of ancestors
who fell in the same migration a year ago?

Isn’t it worth missing whatever joy
you might have dreamed, to wake in the night and find
you and your beloved are holding hands in your sleep?

Try This

The Jungian psychologist James Hillman proposes an exercise that he calls “befriend-
ing the dream.” Quickly write down a dream you have had. Then begin “It’s like…”
and write whatever comes into your head. Every time you come to the end of that
thought, write “It’s like…” and keep going. “It’s like… it’s like… it’s like…”
Some of your phrases may be metaphors, some may be colors, some memories, some
nonsense, some deep emotions. Whenever you feel yourself “stuck” on a piece of writ-
ing, or just want to explore what more may be in it, or what it might be about, you can
also befriend the piece.

DRAMA

Samuel Beckett

Act Without Words

A Mime for One Player

Desert. Dazzling light.
The man is flung backwards on stage from right wing. He falls, gets up imme-
diately, dusts himself, turns aside, reflects.
Whistle from right wing.
He reflects, goes out right.
Immediately flung back on stage he falls, gets up immediately, dusts himself,
turns aside, reflects.
Whistle from left wing.
He reflects, goes out left.
Immediately flung back on stage he falls, gets up immediately, dusts himself,
turns aside, reflects.
Whistle from left wing.
He reflects, goes towards left wing, hesitates, thinks better of it, halts, turns
aside, reflects.
A little tree descends from flies, lands. It has a single bough some three yards
from ground and at its summit a meager tuft of palms casting at its foot a cir-
cle of shadow.
He continues to reflect.
Whistle from above.
He turns, sees tree, reflects, goes to it, sits down in its shadow, looks at his hands.
A pair of tailor's scissors descends from flies, comes to rest before tree, a yard from ground.
He continues to look at his hands.
Whistle from above.
He looks up, sees scissors, takes them and starts to trim his nails.
The palms close like a parasol, the shadow disappears.
He drops scissors, reflects.
A tiny carafe, to which is attached a huge label inscribed WATER, descends from flies, comes to rest some three yards from ground.
He continues to reflect.
Whistle from above.
He looks up, sees carafe, reflects, gets up, goes and stands under it, tries in vain to reach it, renounces, turns aside, reflects.
A big cube descends from flies, lands.
He continues to reflect.
Whistle from above.
He turns, sees cube, looks at it, at carafe, reflects, goes to cube, takes it up, carries it over and sets it down under carafe, tests its stability, gets up on it, tries in vain to reach carafe, renounces, gets down, carries cube back to its place, turns aside, reflects.
A second smaller cube descends from flies, lands.
He continues to reflect.
Whistle from above.
He turns, sees second cube, looks at it, at carafe, goes to second cube, takes it up, carries it over and sets it down under carafe, tests it stability, gets up on it, tries in vain to reach carafe, renounces, gets down, carries second cube to carry it back to its place, hesitates, thinks better of it, sets it down, goes to big cube, takes it up, carries it over and puts it on small one, tests its stability, gets up on them, the cubes collapse, he falls, gets up immediately, brushes himself, reflects.
He takes up small cube, puts it on big one, tests their stability, gets up on them and is about to reach carafe when it is pulled up a little way and comes to rest beyond his reach.
He gets down, reflects, carries cubes back to their place, one by one, turns aside, reflects.
A third still smaller cube descends from flies, lands.
He continues to reflect.
Whistle from above.
He turns, sees third cube, looks at it, reflects, turns aside, reflects.
The third cube is pulled up and disappears in flies.
Beside carafe a rope descends from flies, with knots to facilitate ascent.

He continues to reflect.
Whistle from above.
He turns, sees rope, reflects, goes to it, climbs up it and is about to reach the carafe when rope is let out and deposits him back on ground.
He reflects, looks around for scissors, sees them, goes and picks them up, returns to rope and starts to cut it with scissors.
The rope is pulled up, lifts him off ground, he hangs on, succeeds in cutting rope, falls back on ground, drops scissors, falls, gets up again immediately, brushes himself, reflects.
The rope is pulled up quickly and disappears in flies.
With length of rope in his possession he makes a lasso with which he tries to lasso carafe.
The carafe is pulled up quickly and disappears in flies.
He turns aside, reflects.
He goes with lasso in his hand to tree, looks at bough, turns and looks at cubes, looks again at bough, drops lasso, goes to cubes, takes up small one, carries it over and sets it down under bough, goes back for big one, takes it up and carries it over under bough, makes to put it on small one, hesitates, thinks better of it, sets it down, takes up small one and puts it on big one, tests their stability, turns aside and stoops to pick up lasso.
The bough folds against trunk.
He straightens up with lasso in his hand, turns and sees what has happened.
He drops lasso, turns aside, reflects.
He carries back cubes to their place, one by one, goes back for lasso, carries it over to cubes and lays it in a neat coil on small one.
He turns aside, reflects.
Whistle from right wing.
He reflects, goes out right.
Immediately flung back on stage he falls, gets up immediately, brushes himself, turns aside, reflects.
Whistle from left wing.
He does not move.
He looks at his hands, looks around for scissors, sees them, goes and picks them up, starts to trim his nails, stops, reflects, runs his finger along blade of scissors, goes and lays them on small cube, turns aside, opens his collar, frees his neck and fingers it.
The small cube is pulled up and disappears in flies, carrying away rope and scissors.
He turns to take scissors, sees what has happened.
He turns aside, reflects.
He goes and sits down on big cube.
The big cube is pulled from under him. He falls. The big cube is pulled up and disappears in flies.
He remains lying on his side, his face towards auditorium, staring before him.
The carafe descends from flies and comes to rest a few feet from his body.
He does not move.
Whistle from above.
He does not move.
The carafe descends further, dangles, and plays about his face.
He does not move.
The carafe is pulled up and disappears in flies.
The bough returns to horizontal, the palms open, the shadow returns.
Whistle from above.
He does not move.
The tree is pulled up and disappears in flies.
He looks at his hands.

Curtain

Athol Fugard
The Drummer
Commissioned and First Produced by Actors Theatre of Louisville

Characters
The Man

A city pavement.

Scene: A pile of rubbish on a pavement, waiting to be cleared away. This consists of an overfilled trash-can and a battered old chair with torn upholstery on which is piled an assortment of cardboard boxes and plastic bags full of discarded junk. Distant and intermittent city noises. These will increase in volume and frequency as the action demands.

At Rise: A bum enters. He walks over to the pile of rubbish and starts to work his way through it... looking for something useful in terms of that day's survival. He has obviously just woken up and yawns from time to time. After a few seconds he clears the chair, sits down, makes himself comfortable and continues his search. One of the boxes produces a drumstick. He examines it and then abandons it. A little later he finds a second drumstick. He examines it. Remember? He scratches around in the pile of rubbish at his feet and retrieves the first. Two drumsticks! His find intrigues him. Another dip into the rubbish but it produces nothing further of interest. Two drumsticks! He settles back in his chair and surveys the world.

An ambulance siren approaches and recedes stage right. He observes indifferently. A fire engine approaches and recedes stage left. He observes. While this is going on he taps idly on the lid of the trash-can with one of the drumsticks. He becomes aware of this little action. Two drumsticks and a trash-can! It takes him a few seconds to realize the potential. He straightens up in his chair and with a measure of caution, attempts a little tattoo on the lid of the can. The result is not very impressive. He makes a second attempt, with the same result. Problem! Solution! He gets up and empties the trash-can of its contents, replaces the lid and makes a third attempt. The combination of a serious intention and the now resonant box produces a decided effect. He develops it in due course. He starts to enjoy himself. His excitement gets him onto his feet. He has one last flash of inspiration. He removes the lid from the can, up-ends it, and with great bravura drums out a final tattoo... virtually an accompaniment to the rowdy and urgent city noises all around him. Embellishing his appearance with some item from the rubbish... a cape... and holding his drumsticks ready he chooses a direction and sets off to take on the city. He has discovered it is full of drums... and he has got drumsticks.

The Beginning

Try This
The preceding two pieces are mimes, or plays in which no word is spoken. Beckett and Fugard create very different characters, moods, and stories through action and objects alone. Write a very short mime involving one character and two or three objects. How do these visual equivalents of verbs and images convey an idea?